

Executive Director



David Murrell

Who's Got Your Back?

Friday, January 12 was a very sad day for the law enforcement community. One of our PBA members, **Sergeant Nicholas Sottile** of the Florida Highway Patrol, was gunned down in yet another senseless act of violence against our law enforcement officers. Our deepest sympathy is extended to the Sottile family as we all try to do what is possible to assist and comfort as best we can.

In thinking about this whole situation, I was reminded of my time as an officer with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. Then, as now, officers were fond of saying "We've got your back"—meaning that fellow officers would be there for unwavering protection. I think in the context of a fallen officer that meaning can be taken even further. It also means that the agency, in this case the Florida Highway Patrol, will do whatever it can to protect the surviving family and honor the memory of the fallen officer. The Florida Highway Patrol does an outstanding job in this regard.

Beyond this, it means that PBA has a duty and responsibility to do what it can to protect the officer and the officer's family. To me, this is probably our most solemn and basic undertaking as an organization. It gives us much gratification when something PBA is able to do legislatively or organizationally results in comfort to the family and perhaps prevents future occurrences of such a heinous crime.

I won't go through the whole list, but what follows is some of what we try to do or have done. For starters, PBA provides a Heart Fund benefit to the survivors and this is usually done within a day or two after the officer's passing. We intentionally try to do it quickly—because this is when the officer's family needs something ASAP. While agency, state, and federal benefits are very generous, these may take months

to come about. Thus, we try to fill that gap and provide help right away.

As for the non-PBA benefits, most people have no idea of what is available or how to go about requesting the benefits. Consequently, we present a prepared packet to the family to assist them with this much needed information and offer to help them navigate through the government bureaucracy mazes. And, as for the benefits themselves, we have worked really hard to enhance the benefits provided by local, state, and federal entities.

On another front, we work to ensure that these things never happen in the first place or that justice is done to the perpetrators. For example, we have successfully lobbied

legislation to make it easier to get the death penalty for law enforcement killers. Also, back when inmates on life sentences were getting out after a few years, we joined with others for legislation which means that a life sentence means life and that for other sentences, the inmates have to serve at least 85 per cent of the judge's sentence (the STOP law championed by then—**Senator Charlie Crist**).

And for the killers who do come up for parole, we frequently appear before the Parole Commission to contest release and have a most sympathetic audience from the Commissioners. The Commissioners, by the way, have great insight into these situations: one is a retired Miami-Dade Police Officer and another used to be a Department of Corrections Correctional Probation Officer.

Why do we, as an organization, try to do these sorts of things for an officer and his or her family? Simple: it is our reason for being. We just hope that somehow, in some way, we can make a bad situation a little bit better for those who undertake such a dangerous job. We've got your back. ■

"...we work to ensure that these things never happen in the first place..."

In Memoriam



Sergeant Nicholas Sottile

Born: September 7, 1958.

End of Watch: January 12, 2007

Sergeant Sottile, a 24-year veteran of the FHP, was assigned to Troop F – Arcadia. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Nicholas and Heather. Sergeant Sottile's son, Nicholas, is also a member of the Patrol. Trooper Sottile is assigned to Troop C – Tampa.



Senator Bill Posey presents an unexpected, but most welcome contribution to the family of FHP Sergeant Nicholas Sottile. What a generous and thoughtful Legislator!

PBA DEATH & DISABILITY PLAN

By Glenda Kelly



For participating PBA Charters and Chapters, members are eligible for coverage through the Florida PBA Heart Fund, a charitable organization (see page 25 for more details). The benefits include: Disability Benefits to officers permanently and totally disabled due to a catastrophic injury while in actual performance of their duties (\$15,000); Death benefits for officers killed in the actual performance of their duties (\$30,000); and all benefits are payable to either the officer, spouse, or dependent children. Please contact Glenda Kelly, (glenda@flpba.org), 1-800-733-3722, extension 426 for more information.